



**PRESS RELEASE**  
*Office of the United States Attorney  
Middle District of Florida*

**PAUL I. PEREZ**  
**UNITED STATES ATTORNEY**

400 North Tampa Street  
Suite 3200  
Tampa, Florida 33602  
813/274-6000  
813/274-6300 (Fax)

300 North Hogan Street  
Suite 700  
Jacksonville, Florida 32202  
904/301-6300  
904/301-6310 (Fax)

501 West Church Street  
Suite 300  
Orlando, Florida 32805  
407/648-7500  
407/648-7643 (Fax)

2110 First Street  
Suite 3-137  
Fort Myers, Florida 33901  
239/461-2200  
239/461-2219 (Fax)

**Contact: Steve Cole ♦ Public Affairs Specialist ♦ 813/274-6352**

**For Immediate Release**

July 18, 2006

**COCAINE SMUGGLERS PLEAD GUILTY TO TRANSPORTING DRUGS  
IN UNDERWATER VESSEL**

Tampa, Florida - United States Attorney Paul I. Perez announced today that eight defendants from Colombia, who used a fishing vessel to tow a submersible vessel containing approximately five thousand, five hundred pounds of cocaine across the Eastern Pacific Ocean, pled guilty yesterday in U.S. District Court to a two-count Superseding Indictment charging them with possession of five kilograms or more of cocaine with the intent to distribute. The defendants are facing a mandatory minimum term of ten years' imprisonment up to maximum life imprisonment, and a \$4 million fine. The defendants' sentencing hearing is scheduled for October 13, 2006 at 9:00 a.m. before United States District Judge James D. Whittemore.

The defendants were intercepted by the United States Coast Guard on August 19, 2005 while traveling aboard the Colombian fishing vessel RIO MAR I in international waters approximately ninety miles southwest of the Galapagos Islands. The submersible vessel used to transport the cocaine was of steel construction, approximately thirty-one feet in

length and four feet in diameter, and was equipped with a whip antennae connected to an electronic transmitting device in the nose cone. This seizure marks the first capture by U.S. law enforcement of a submersible vessel used to transport cocaine from Colombia.

This case was investigated by the Operation Panama Express Taskforce which is comprised of the United States Coast Guard (USCG), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The case was prosecuted by Special Assistant United States Attorney Diane M. Croff and Assistant United States Attorney Christopher P. Tuite.

---